



Standards of Accreditation: At a Glance

Provide requirements for school instructional programs, roles of staff, graduation, school accreditation, and the School Performance Report Card

Adopted by the Board of Education in October 1997 after twenty-one public hearings

Eight informational workshops provided for school division personnel; numerous presentations to educational groups throughout Commonwealth

Graduation Requirements

Units of credit required to graduate with Standard diploma raised from twenty-one to twenty-two, earned by subject area

- ★ Subject areas include: English; Mathematics; History and Social Science; Fine Arts or Practical Arts; Health and Physical Education; Science; and Electives

Units of credit required to graduate with Advanced Studies diploma raised from twenty-three to twenty-four, earned by subject area

- ★ Subject areas include all those for the Standard diploma plus Foreign Language

Ninth graders for the 1998-99 school year (Class of 2002) are first high school students who must earn additional units of credit

Units of credit designated as either “standard” or “verified”

- ★ “Standard” unit earned after successful completion of 140 clock hours of instruction in course offered for high school credit
- ★ “Verified” unit earned after successful completion of 140 clock hours of instruction and passing Standards of Learning test for specific high school course

Eleven high school tests aligned to SOLs; assess basic skills and knowledge in English, Mathematics, Science, and History and Social Science

To graduate, six verified units of credit required for the Standard diploma; nine verified units required for Advanced Studies diploma

Ninth graders for the 2000-2001 school year (Class of 2004) are first high school students who must earn verified units of credit to graduate

School Accreditation Requirements

Accreditation of school based on student performance on the SOL tests; phase-in begins with 1998-99 school year

Phase-in years for accreditation requirements extend through 2002-03 school year

Three accreditation ratings during implementation years: “Fully Accredited,” “Provisionally Accredited,” and “Accredited with Warning”

“Fully Accredited” rating in elementary and middle schools based on percentage of eligible students in grades 3, 5,



and 8, respectively, achieving passing scores in each core area

- * eligible student is one who is enrolled in school, with exception of those excluded by Individualized Education Program, 504 Plan, or Limited English Proficient committee
- * **3rd grade:** 70 percent in English/Reading; 70 percent Mathematics; 50 percent Science; 50 percent History and Social Science
- * **5th and 8th grades:** 70 percent in each of the four core disciplines

“Fully Accredited” rating in secondary schools based on percentage of eligible students passing certain high school course tests

- * **High schools:** 70 percent in each of the four core disciplines

“Provisionally Accredited” rating available from 1999 through 2003; represents less than 70 percent passing rate but improvement in scores over previous year

“Accredited with Warning” rating for schools showing no improvement in passing rate or dropping from previous year

Upon receipt of “Accredited with Warning” status, a school prepares a Corrective Action Plan

- * Signed by principal and local superintendent
- * Approved by local school board
- * Beginning with school year 2001-2002, improvement plan submitted to Board of Education
- * Corrective Action Plan specifies assistance needed, staff development requirements, and requested waivers from Board of Education

“Accreditation with Warning” rating replaces “Provisionally Accredited” rating beginning with school year 2003-2004

- * Schools which do not attain 70 percent passing rate, even if improved over previous year, are “Accredited with Warning” (50 percent for 3rd grade Science and History and Social Science)

Beginning with school year 2003-2004, three consecutive years of “Accredited with Warning” status leads to “Accreditation Denied”

First time “Accreditation Denied” status possible for school is school year 2006-2007



Standards of Accreditation: A Closer Look

The revised Standards of Accreditation (SOA) were adopted by the Board of Education in September of 1997. Adoption of the regulations initiated the phase of educational reform which addresses public accountability. The SOA, which must be met by all public schools, raise graduation requirements, provide for increased instructional time in the core subject areas, and base a school's accreditation rating on student academic achievement as shown on the SOL tests. They also establish standards for communication and community relations and set forth the philosophy, goals, and objectives of public education in Virginia.

For the first time in Virginia, schools will earn their accreditation based primarily on how well students have mastered academic concepts and analytical skills. The time schedule for implementing the new accreditation standards provides a transition period for schools to diagnose problem areas and deficiencies and to make improvements.

Public hearings and informational meetings held throughout state

The new standards are the result of broad public consensus on what citizens expect from their schools. Prior to the adoption of the SOA, public hearings were held around the state. Preliminary hearings were conducted during August of 1996 to solicit suggestions and comments from the public prior to the drafting of the regulations. A second round of hearings was held during March and April of 1997 and a third in July. There were twenty-one in all. Parents, educators, and business leaders spoke at the hearings and provided written comments by mail.

The SOA were adopted by the Board of Education in October 1997. During December 1997, the Department conducted eight informational workshops for educators within each of the superintendents' regions of the state. Content of the SOA was reviewed as well as the SOLs and the structure of the SOL test blueprints. Since that time, numerous presentations have been made before educational groups throughout the state to discuss, explain, and interpret the SOA.

Raised expectations for promotion and requirements for graduation and accreditation

The SOA require that the SOL test results for individual students be considered in promotion and retention decisions at grades 3, 5, and 8, and in provision of instruction for students who need additional help. Beginning with the ninth grade class of 2000-01, a student must earn "verified credits" by passing certain high school course tests in the academic core areas in order to graduate with a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma. The number of units of credit necessary to earn a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma has been raised through the SOA.

The SOA also addresses the accreditation status of schools, based on the percentage of students who pass the SOL tests. For school year 1998-99, all schools will be *Provisionally Accredited*. After the next assessments are completed and scored in 1999, a school's status will be *Fully Accredited* (70 percent of its students passed the tests); *Provisionally Accredited* (scores have improved over the previous year); or *Accredited with Warning* (there has been no improvement, or scores have dropped over the previous year).



Beginning in the year school year 2003-2004, a school which is rated "Accredited with Warning" for three consecutive years will lose its accreditation. No school can lose its accreditation before school year 2006-07.

If accreditation is denied to a school, the local school division and local school board must prepare a Corrective Action Plan with the participation of the community. The plan must be submitted to the Board of Education for approval. If a school continues to be "Accredited with Warning" during the 2001-02 school year, the Corrective Action Plan is to be reviewed by a Peer Education Advisory Group appointed by the Board of Education. This group will provide technical assistance.

The purpose of the implementation period for the new accreditation procedures is to allow time for the identification of issues and problems and their resolution. The Board of Education is committed to working with schools to give them the assistance they need to raise performance.

School and community communications promoted through Report Card

The SOA requires the preparation of an annual School Performance Report Card which is intended to ensure that parents and the community receive information about a specific school's testing results, accreditation rating, and characteristics. Through the Report Card, citizens will have a simple means of finding out information about the school, including average attendance rates, dropout rates, school safety indicators, and other quality indicators.



Standards of Accreditation: Graduation Requirements

Units of credit earned for diploma increased; verified units required

Beginning with the graduating class of 2001-2002, Virginia students will complete additional units of credit to earn a Standard or an Advanced Studies diploma. These students are ninth graders for the 1998-99 school year. A total of twenty-two units of credit will be required for the Standard diploma, changed from twenty-one. Twenty-four units of credit must be earned for the Advanced Studies diploma, changed from twenty-three.

A unit of credit is designated either as a "standard" unit or a "verified" one. A standard unit is awarded after a student successfully completes a course with 140 clock hours of instruction. A verified unit is awarded when, in addition to successful completion of 140 hours for a course, the student passes a specific high school course test developed to assess Standards of Learning (SOLs) achievement.

Students who will be in the ninth grade in school year 2000-2001 will be the first who must

earn six verified units of credit in order to graduate with a Standard diploma. At that time, the requirements for the Advanced Studies diploma will

include earning nine verified units of credit by passing nine specific SOL high school course tests.

Units of credit specified by academic subject area

For the Standard diploma:

<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Total Units of Credit</i>	<i>Number Required to be Verified</i>
English	4	2
Mathematics	3	1
History and Social Science	3	1
Laboratory Science	3	1
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1	
Health and Physical Education	2	
Electives	6	
Student-Selected Test	--	1
Total	22	6

For the Advanced Studies diploma:

<i>Content Area</i>	<i>Total Units of Credit</i>	<i>Number Required to be Verified</i>
English	4	2
Mathematics	4	2
History and Social Science	4	2
Laboratory Science	4	2
Foreign Language	3	
Fine Arts or Practical Arts	1	
Health and Physical Education	2	
Electives	2	
Student-Selected Test	--	1
Total	24	9



Eleven tests for certain high school courses, aligned to SOLs

Specific high school course tests are aligned to the Standards of Learning to assess basic skills and knowledge in the areas of English, Mathematics, Science, and History. There are eleven tests for high school courses. A separate test for World Geography is under development. The tests are:

English — Grades 9-11, 2 tests:

- ✧ Writing
- ✧ Reading, Literature, and Research

Mathematics — 3 tests:

- ✧ Algebra I
- ✧ Geometry
- ✧ Algebra II

History and Social Science — 3 tests:

- ✧ World History to 1000 A.D. and World Geography
- ✧ World History 1000 A.D. to Present and World Geography
- ✧ U.S. History

Science — 3 tests:

- ✧ Earth Science
- ✧ Biology
- ✧ Chemistry

Students must take a designated high school test for every 140-hour class completed in the above subjects, even if the verified units of credit required to earn a diploma have already been earned. The scores on all of the specific high school tests a student takes have an impact on the accreditation rating of his or her school.

The passing scores for the high school tests will be set by the Board of Education after receipt of recommendations from Standard Setting Committees comprised of educators, teachers, and curriculum specialists.

If a student does not pass a high school test which must count as a verified credit for graduation, he or she may re-take the test in the summer, or as often as the testing schedule permits. When a student who is below the ninth grade successfully completes courses offered for units of credit in grades 9 through 12, the standard units of credits earned and the verified units of credit earned will count towards completion of graduation requirements.

Provisions are available for students who transfer after the beginning of their senior year and are unable to meet the verified credit requirements. Arrangements may be made with the previous school to award the diploma, or a waiver of verified credit requirements may be requested by the local school board from the Department of Education.



Standards of Accreditation: School Accreditation Requirements

Implementation years for accreditation requirements are 1998-99 school year through 2002-03 school year

The accreditation of schools based on student performance on the Standards of Learning tests becomes effective in the 1998-99 school year. The implementation years for the accreditation requirements extend through 2002-03. A *Provisionally Accredited* rating was granted to all schools meeting pre-accreditation requirements on July 1, 1998. Pre-accreditation requirements include course offerings to allow completion of graduation requirements, the ability to offer instructional programs prescribed in the SOA, leadership and staffing requirements prescribed in the SOA, and facilities and safety provisions.

Beginning with the 1999-2000 school year, all schools will be expected to show a 70 percent student passing rate in each of the four core content areas of English, Mathematics, Science, and History and Social Science to achieve a *Fully*

Accredited rating. (The exceptions are for Science and History and Social Science in third grade, which is a 50 percent passing rate.) During the implementation period, if a school's student passing rate is below 70 percent but has improved over the previous year, a school's rating will be *Provisionally Accredited*. Schools which do not achieve improvements in the percentage passing SOL tests, or which drop from the previous year, will be designated *Accredited with Warning* through the implementation period.

Evaluation by percentage of eligible students passing SOL tests

Elementary and middle schools will be evaluated by the percentage of eligible students in grades 3, 5, and 8, respectively, who achieve passing scores on the SOL tests in each of the four subject areas. An eligible student is defined as one who is enrolled in the school, with the exception of those excluded from the testing program through an Individualized Education Plan or 504 Plan or Limited English Proficient committee. In 8th grade, certain high school course tests will be counted if they are being taken for credit towards graduation from a secondary school.

Percentages of passing students required at the 3rd grade are 70 percent English/Reading; 70 percent Mathematics; 50 percent Science, and 50 percent History and Social Science. The student passing percentages required in the 5th and 8th grades are 70 percent of eligible students in each of the four subject areas.

Secondary schools will be evaluated according to student achievement on the high school SOL tests taken, as defined by the percentage of eligible students achieving a passing score. The required percentage of students passing the SOL tests in high school is 70 percent in each of the four content areas.

First year for "Accreditation Denied" status 2006-2007 school year

From 1999 through 2003 schools will receive the status of *Provisionally Accredited* if they are under the 70 percent passing rate but show improvement over the previous year. Schools showing no improvement in passing rates or dropping from the previous year will be *Accredited with Warning*. Upon receipt of a notification of "Accredited with Warning" status, a school must develop a



corrective action plan to improve student achievement in SOL tests over two years. The corrective action plan must be signed by the principal and the local superintendent and approved by the local school board. It is to be developed with the participation of parents and teachers, and be made available to the community. During the phase-in years of the accreditation rating process, the local school board works with a school that has been “Accredited with Warning” to develop and implement an improvement plan which will result in full accreditation.

Beginning in the 2001-2002 school year, schools continuing to be “Accredited with Warning” must submit an improvement plan to the Board of Education by October 1, 2002. The plan must be implemented not later than the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, include how remediation for failing students will be accomplished, and document student academic improvements. It must specify required staff development and assistance needed, and include requested waivers to state and local regulations to increase flexibility in meeting academic objectives. The Board of Education will establish a Peer Educator Advisory Group to provide technical assistance in evaluating the corrective action plans.

Kirk T. Schroder, president of the Board of Education, has stated:

“We as a board are going to do everything we can in working with the education community to give schools the tools . . . they need to raise performance. It’s an important responsibility that we take seriously.”